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Hinduism: an exposition

& Vedicism. 1920

HINDUISM

(AN EXPOSITION AND VINDICATION)

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This little essay on Hinduism has been written chiefly with the intention of explaining briefly the elements of the predominant religion of India not only to our own young men but also to the world at large in a systematic and a concise form, giving most of the necessary details in their proper perspective. It is a matter of regret that very few works on the subject are available to those who wish to get an adequate idea of Hinduism without going through the whole mass of detailed literature in the original and sifting what is relevant to the subject. Whatever little literature is available at present in English is mostly by those naturally interested in exposing the so-called backwardness of the Hindu religion, interpreting it on the authority of the street superstitions of a now ignorant though ancient people, and hoping to prove to the inquisitive and believing foreign religious enthusiast the rationalistic thoroughness of his own faith by holding the misinterpreted Hinduism in such an undesirable relief. It is therefore that a work of the nature herein attempted seems to be the desideratum of the day. Some years ago a prominent paper from northern India "the Leader" invited articles on the subject of Hinduism from various learned sources and issued about a score of replies that were received from certain scholars in a pamphlet form under the title of "Essentials of Hinduism." That little book, however, instead of enlightening the reader rather puzzles him into a wealth of debatable details and often loses him in the unimportant labyrinths of controversial inexactitudes. The present essay has therefore been written to attempt a systematic exposition of Hinduism in a small compass with a view further to give an incentive to others who are in a better position to present the matter to the public with a deeper and more specialized knowledge of the subject.

The average foreigner's idea of a Hindu, derived as it is from the writings of the proselytising and not often impartial padres, is that of a superstitious, custom-ridden, half-dressed individual enjoying a semi-barbarous though an ancient civilization. Founded

as these superstitions were for the promotion of national welfare through the agency of those not always capable of realizing the importance of that end, they nevertheless have never formed an integral part of the religion as such. The customs of the Hindus, which were at times a direct outcome of the religious teachings of some sacred books or saints and sometimes a result of the necessary adjustment to circumstances, based though they originally were on rationalistic wisdom, have no doubt in most cases grown into blank superstition in the hands of the uneducated and poverty-stricken masses, but a rapid spread of education is certain to remove this weedy outgrowth, leaving the parent tree still healthy and uninjured. The believing but unknowing Hindu pilgrim would not perhaps in future march blindly off to the places of pilgrimage without knowing that he is expected through these religious perigrinations to get a comprehensive idea of practically the whole of India, coming in touch with every description of the people and thus acquiring breadth of view and the real advantage of travels.

Hinduism proper is unlike other religions based primarily on ethics and not on theology. A course of conduct here is regarded as advisable not because of any sanction from a Superior Being, but because it is essentially correct from the ethical point of view. Hinduism being thus a code for the living of a virtuous life, based on moral philosophy, a true religionist takes his lead in every branch of life from religious principles and practices his devotions at every step. The religion of the Hindus is professed by about 240 millions of Indians whereas the culture of Hinduism, it is claimed, has spread in lands outside India, so much so that even now the islands of Java, Bali etc., have a complete Indian civilization.

The sacred authority on which Hinduism bases itself are the Vedas divided into four books, which have now attained a divine sanctity. The date at which the Vedas were written is still a disputed point. Some western authors regard them as no older than about 1200 B. C., but the present writers have attempted to prove in their Hindi work on Indian History that the dates of these sacred books may be fixed between 4000 and 2500 B. C. The periods that followed the Vedas are those in which the Brahmans and the Sutras were compiled. The present writers in this case again do not find themselves in accord with the Western Scholars for, whereas they regard them as ranging from 1000 to 600 B. C., these sacred books

would seem in reality to have been composed between 2500 and 500 B. C. There exist approximately between 60 and 70 Brahmanas, some 130 Upanishads (the philosophical side of the Brahmanas) and a number of Sutra books. The Buddhistic period followed that of the Sutras, towards the end of which the influence of the new Pauranic literature had begun to be felt, so much so that eventually it completely succeeded that of the Buddhists. The Pauranic Period was accordingly mostly contemporary with the Buddhistic and partly a result of it, though orthodox Hindus have generally a tendency to fix this period much earlier. After the Pauranic period began the present religious period with the advent of Mohamedans in India.

The Hindus are divided into two main classes, the Aryans and the Sudras, the former being again subdivided into three castes, the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas. The Brahmanas represent the intellect, the Kshatriyas administration and the Vaishyas trade and commerce of the Hindu Society, the Sudras being the classes which form chiefly the labouring population of the Hindus. The social importance of all the four classes is placed in the above order, the whole structure constituting the present day Hindu Society. The Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Sudras are known as the four castes, each of which in its turn is sub-divided into a number of sub-castes. Each caste now keeps completely aloof from the others, so much so that even their law prohibits inter-caste marriages, although efforts are now being made to remedy this evil. The Brahmanas during the Hindu ascendancy in India used to be sages, writers, legislators, and ministers of kings and consequently were ungrudgingly regarded as socially higher than the Kshatriyas who held the position of kings and fighters. Such a division into castes is believed to have greatly benefitted India. So long as the inclusion into or exclusion from a caste was based on personal inclination and attainments, the caste system was saved from stagnating, as it were, in an airtight atmosphere of a confined pigeon-hole, but as soon as the system degenerated into a stereotyped hereditary classification, it began to be productive of more evil than good. The basis of Hindu society now is neither wealth nor personal qualifications; the mere accident of birth is the sole qualification to entitle the demanding of homage from the castes which are supposed to stand lower in the scale. Such is the view that one must take of the Hindu system of caste from outside,

but it is necessary to emphasize that the relative position of individuals in each community *inter se* is based mostly on democratic and socialistic principles, the Kshatriyas being the only exception to this rule. Amongst them prevails the greatest respect for the ruling families despite the general tendency of the whole system. There is no sharp social distinction between the rich and the poor of different communities. A Brahman for example, holding a materially lower position in life, often demands some respect even from a ruling prince of the Kshatriya community in the usual course of events.

The missionary work of the Hindus is not at present carried on in any organised form. Formerly the only people through whom this kind of work was conducted were the instructors (Gurus) and reciters of sacred hymns. Such recitations and expositions of sacred books still take place at some temples and places of pilgrimages or at festive occasions, public or private. In addition some preaching religious institutions have been formed of late, but no regular organizations for the spread of Hinduism is undertaken, no doubt on the ground that Hinduism does not now advocate conversions. The main religious Hindu institutions at present consist of certain places of pilgrimages, temples and Gurudwaras (places of renowned religious instructors).

The Hindu, it would thus be seen, is an essentially devotional and religious person, believing in tenderness, mercy and a strong love for the family. This love for the family and its members is reflected in the system of large joint Hindu families which, it is noticeable, often consist not only of the immediate relations but also of brothers, cousins and their children irrespective of age. The life is essentially mild, tolerant and affectionate, but it has to be confessed that the sterner virtues are often conspicuous by their absence, though luckily there is now a daily increasing number of educated people who will not be found at all deficient even in this direction. With due progress of education the Hindus will, it may confidently be expected, shake off their weak points without parting with what is good in them and assimilate only the strong points of western culture with which a wise Providence has brought them into contact in this ancient land of Bharat-Varsha.

It may perhaps be added that we have written nothing with the object of offending the susceptibilities of others. By its very

nature the work is more or less of a sectarian character but efforts have been made to keep it as unaggressive and purely defensive as possible. The authors have not refrained from exposing the weak points of Hindus as well. They hope to be excused for any expression of unpalatable opinions about others, their only object being a search after the Truth.

THE AUTHORS

Allahabad. }
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HINDUISM

PART I

THE NATURE OF HINDUISM

ALTHOUGH there are over 24 crores of Hindus in the world who think they understand their religion, it has been found difficult even by scholars to define Hinduism.

There is a difference of opinion as to the origin of the word Hindu and Hindustan. Hindu is not a Sanskrit word. The name has been given to us by foreigners, and many believe that they called us by this name by way of derision. In Arabic the word Hindu means a slave and for this reason many patriotic and self-respecting people do not like to be called by this name. The appellation, however, is now so prevalent as to make it highly improper for any one to fight shy of it. Even if its origin be taken to be derisive, the denotation and connotation of the word have acquired considerable elevation and become great enough for one to be proud of. Besides, there is no other word to denote the entire Hindu nation; the word Arya does not include the Sudras and the "*Varnasram Dharmi*" excludes those who do not consider themselves belonging to any particular caste. The absence of any other word of the same significance seems to be one of the main reasons for the popularity of this term. Its origin also does not seem to be Arabic but Greek. When the Greeks came to India, they were highly impressed for the first time by the Sindh river. Pronouncing 'S' as 'H,' as they generally do, they called this country Hinda and its inhabitants Hindus.

In expounding Hinduism it is better to start with negative rather than affirmative definitions, as the former

are more easily comprehensible to an enquirer than the latter.

The most important point on which the Hindu religion differs from others is that it does not rest on any dogma. One, for example, who does not believe in one God and the intervention of Mohamet is not a Moham-medan, but for a Hindu it is not obligatory to believe in the sanctity or greatness of any individual or to accept any particular doctrine. Iswara, Vishnu, Siva, the ten Avatars (incarnations) and others are worshipable persons or divinities, but it is quite legitimate for one to be a good Hindu without believing in any of them, and to-day the number of such Hindus is not small. Similarly there are the Vedas, the *Smrities*, the *Upanisats*, the *Gita*, the *Purans*, the *Upa-Purans*, the different systems of philosophy and many other religious works in none of which may one have much faith, and yet he may be a good Hindu ; indeed one may not believe even in God. In ancient times, men like Charvaka were Hindus of this type and there are hundreds of such Hindus now to be met with. Amongst their religious works, the Vedas command so great a reverence that the term *Nastik* (atheist) does not mean a renouncer of God but a disbeliever in the authority of the Vedas. In spite of this, there are six *Astik* (theistic) and a similar number of *Nastik* (atheistic) systems of philosophy.

Apparently this seems very wonderful and a casual on-looker may well suppose that a man who does not believe in any system of Indian thought cannot be called a Hindu. Yet the fact is that no particular belief is essential for Hinduism, as it relies on ethics rather than on beliefs. The doubt arises simply because the vast majority of outsiders have experience of only individualistic and dogmatic religions. The word religion is itself derived from a root implying restraint rather than liberty *viz.* religio: to bind. The followers of other religions have to accept a dogma or dogmas beyond which they

cannot go as such. If any person, for any proper or improper reasons, finds himself unable to accept any special relation between God and a prophet, he cannot be said to belong to the religion the prophet of which he defies, howsoever good and philanthropic he may be. It will follow that he would not be considered an altogether good man so far as those religions go. There is no room in Hinduism for such ideas. It lays emphasis on good deeds and does not denounce any man whose actions are good, simply because he does not accept the sanctity of any special dogma, person, or book. We have not even a word to express clearly the idea of religion, and have to use the word *Dharma* or *Mat* for this purpose, although in reality the former means duty and the latter opinion. We have had so great a freedom of thought among us, that there is no word implying restraint even to express the idea of religion. The Hindu religion was not settled for the Indian people, like the American constitution, at any particular time or times, by any person or persons. It has on the contrary grown gradually like the British constitution.

The difficulty in following a particular individual is that the defects arising out of the possible narrowness of his ideas and experiences become integral parts of the ethics of his followers. To take an example, the great prophet Mohamet was born in such a country and at such a time as to live among people who were given to the practice of polygamy. He probably wished to do away with this bad custom, but perhaps could not be sure that he would be able to remove it altogether. He therefore seems to have hit at the next best solution, ruling that no one should have more than 4 wives at one and the same time. If he had been born in the 19th or 20th century, he would perhaps have not considered more than one living wife proper for any one. Similarly Gautam Buddha was born at a time when the Vedas and the caste system were held in great esteem.

The former led to the slaughter of animals at sacrifices along with the recitation of the very Vedic hymns propounding respect for all life, while the latter contributed to the withholding in society of equal respect for individuals of varying castes even when they possessed similar merits. The caste system was, according to the notions current at the time, based on the very body of Ishwara (personal God). The Vedas and God thus appeared to Gautam Buddha the chief sources of most of the improper practices current in the society at the time. It was probably for these reasons that Buddha did not recognise the existence of Ishwara or even *Parameshwar* (God) and denounced the Vedas along with *Yajnas* (sacrifices). He had to denounce the caste system of the Hindus and had to go so far as not to recognise even God who was its alleged basis. In time his followers developed this agnosticism into rank atheism which became one of the potent causes of the downfall of Buddhism in India. We can thus show many similar draw-backs in individualistic religions, due to the narrowness of the experiences of or special expediency adopted by the individuals concerned.

Similarly the great defect in dogmatic religions is that dogmas cannot be the personal convictions of every follower. The ideas of each man are high or low according to his birth, surroundings, education, and experiences. These differ widely in different individuals and so their ideas are also bound to differ widely from one another. Any particular dogma, however high or low, cannot therefore suit all persons who are under different stages of development and cannot therefore become a part of their personal convictions. Those whose development has not reached so high would accept a lower dogma while those who have gone beyond it must crave for a higher standard. It is therefore lucky that Hinduism should not have thought it necessary to accept the binding character of any particular dogma or individual.

We now take up the affirmative side of the definition of Hinduism. We have already seen that it is not dogmatic or individualistic. It does not care for faiths but hinges on character. Whatever his convictions, if one's character is good he is a good Hindu, for Hinduism depends on character and search for truth. One who is firm on these two points is a respectable Hindu. This cannot however be called a definition of Hinduism, because then every good man, whatever his religion, would be considered a Hindu. It must however be remembered that his Hinduism in this case must be based only on his non-profession of another religion. If the follower of any other religion gives it up, accepts the above two points and calls himself a Hindu, he should be entitled to be called a Hindu. Broadly speaking, every descendant of an ancestral religious Indian, who lives in India or has settled elsewhere and does not profess any other religion, is a Hindu. This definition is based on the opinion of the late Hon'ble Mr. Krishna Swami Ayer of Madras. No better definition of a Hindu has yet been given. The term Hindu is really a geographical expression and means an Indian. It has come to be used in a religious sense only by subsequent developments.

We quote below a *Sloka* from Manu himself to show that it is not only our opinion that the essence of Hinduism is free from respect for dogmas and individuals but that authoritative Rishis of yore held this view :—

“धृतिः क्षमादमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधोदशकर्मण्यम् ॥”

The ten properties of religion are patience, forgiveness, self-control, non-thieving, cleanliness, control of body, wisdom, knowledge, truth and want of anger. These are the ten ancient commandments of the Hindus, and it may be remarked that none of them prescribes respect for any individual or dogma as necessary but they all lay emphasis on character and truth.

DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM

We have already said that the Hindu religion has been growing with time. Its *modus operandi* has been the preaching of the principles of toleration, accommodation, assimilation and evolution. History, Geography and accidents have given our religion its present shape. The Aryans, Turanians, Scythians, Shakas, Huns, Gurjars, Kushans and others came to India from time to time, but the above principles welded them and the aborigines all together and made them into one nation

Asia has the proud privilege of being the cradle of all great religions of the world. It has produced two sets of religions, *viz.* Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc., forming one group and Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohamedanism constituting the other. The first group lays emphasis on character and the second on principles and persons. If we draw a perpendicular line across Asia in continuation of the Suleman mountains, we see that the religions to the west of it emphasise principles while those to the east lay stress on character. The western religions also emphasised the idea of a God specially as master or father. The western God, however, is altogether different from nature (*Prakriti*) and soul (*Purusha*), although He is their creator and guide. On the other hand, the eastern God is somewhat mixed up with *prakriti*, and *purusha*, insomuch so that Buddhism has maintained *prakriti* and *Purusha* alone by eliminating God altogether. This is also the principle of the Sankhya philosophy of the Hindus as propounded by Kapila and others. It must however be remembered that the Hindu religion is essentially Theistic and Monotheistic. Hero-worship, gratefulness and respect for authority, antiquity and custom have been parts of oriental nature. These are also found in China, Japan and Burma. Hero-worship and gratefulness have led to ancestor-worship among them. The Hindu got the ideas of incar-

nation from hero-worship alone, and gratefulness produced among them respect for the cow, for Brahmans and also for horses in olden days. Respect for antiquity has given us universal toleration. If the customs of any people differed from theirs, the Hindus considered them good for those people and by degrees the accommodation thus offered led to a certain amount of assimilation. These processes brought about the evolution of new forms of religion and custom from time to time and the habits of mind thus formed enabled them always to weld in time the different nationalities into one and accordingly the Indian nation always acquired in time fresh strength from the various invasions of India. This strengthened Indian nationality in the same way as did the welding together of the Anglo-Saxons in England. The habitual toleration of the Hindus has been so great that Buddhism was considered a part of, and not a religion separate from, Hinduism for full three hundred years after its birth. Sikhism and Jainism are still considered as parts of Hinduism.

The present day downfall of the Hindus, which is the result of at least one thousand years of decline, accounts for their inability to assimilate the Mohamedans and Christians among them and their nationality has thus suffered a serious set back. The principles of toleration, accommodation and assimilation account for the existence of even contradictory principles in their sacred books, and their acceptance by the same people. Such has been our respect for antiquity that our reformers and originators of new principles did not call them new but sought to support the alleged antiquity of their brand new opinions by placing special and even distorted constructions upon ancient works and established authority. Controversy amongst us is called *Shastrarth* which means not the advancing of new arguments but expositions of sacred books.

Hinduism has apparently continued to be the same from time immemorial, but its emphasis has from time to time been laid on different and sometimes contradictory points.

THE FIVE NATURAL EPOCHS OF HINDUISM

It will perhaps be worth while to give here a brief historical survey of the development of the Hindu religion. The five natural epochs of it, necessarily of varying length and importance, may broadly be classified as below in chronological order :—

(1) The pre-Vedic period, from time immemorial to 4000 B. C.

(2) The Vedic period, 4000 B. C. to 500 B. C.

{ (a) The Samhita period 4000—2500 B. C.; (b) the
Brahman period 2500—1400 B. C., and (c) the
Sutra period 1400—500 B. C.

(3) The Budhistic period, 500 B. C. to 800 A. D.

(4) The Pauranic period, 500 B. C. to 1000 A. D.

(5) The Present period, 1000 A. D. onward.

It is not proposed to repeat here the reasons for fixation of the above periods; they will be found with some fulness of details in our Hindi History of India, Volume I, published by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad. We hold that the Aryans migrated into India about 6000 B. C., but Vedic hymns began to be composed about 4000 B. C. when they had already practically forgotten that India was not their original home. Their religious views during this vast interval of about 20 centuries may be presumed to have been akin to those expressed in the earlier Vedic Samhitas; there is no record of them in our literature and all we are left to content ourselves with is our inferences and conjectures from comparisons and analogies. The Vedic culture in time succeeded in thoroughly influencing the whole of India excepting the extreme South and the extreme South-East, known as the Tamil country, which also subsequently succumbed to the superior civilisation of the Aryans, though not before

it had greatly developed its old pre-Vedic civilization the effect of which is reflected in the inclusion of Shiva in the Hindu trinity (Trimurti) and the elevation of Kali. Eastern Bengal also added its quota to these developments.

With these introductory remarks we now proceed with our concise sketch of the religious developments of the above periods.

During the Pre-Vedic period (before 4000 B. C.), animism was the chief form of religion. The people worshipped trees, rivers, mountains, ghosts &c., at the time, before of course the advent of the Aryans into India

The Vedic period (4000—500 B. C.) begins 2000 years after the immigration of the Aryans and divides itself into 3 sub-heads as detailed above. The *Samhitas* are the Vedic hymns, the *Brahmanas* deal with rituals and ceremonies and the *Upanishats* represent the philosophy of the Vedas. The *Sutras* contain a fuller development of the Vedic and the Brahmanic religions, and introduce more minute details as to the duties of good religionists in the various stages of development. They also introduce for the first time the famous conception of Tri-murti—*viz.*, looking at God in the three aspects of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer as practically three separate entities.

These three constitute the Vedic literature, the Vedas being our most sacred books. The Sutra period stands for conservation and consolidation.

During the Samhita period (4000 B. C. to 2500 B. C.) emphasis was laid on the chanting of hymns and worship of the 33 divinities connected therewith. Many think that Hindus believe in more than one God and put forward the 33 Vedic divinities in support of this plea. These 33 Vedic divinities somehow developed into 33 crores during the Pauranic period. It is a mistake to hold that the Vedas propound the existence of more than one God. The

word *Devata* which is used in the Vedas to express these divinities really means a shining being. *Devatas* are therefore only like the angels and have nothing to do with God which idea is expressed by the word *Parameshwara* and not *Devata*. We have in the Vedic divinities mostly personifications of the forces of nature, brought into being primarily not for worship but as expressions of poetical ideas. Our *Devatas* do not possess unlimited power ; it is said to be increasable by Yajnas (sacrifices). Some of the *Devatas* were originally human beings and were elevated to that position by their good actions ; the cases of Maruta and 'Twashta can be regarded as illustrations of this statement. Rudra is a very ordinary divinity in the Veds, but he acquired great importance during the Pauranic period under the names of Shiva, Mahadeva etc. The word *Upendra* (i.e. Vishnu) itself means subsidiary Indra. The Vedas say so definitely, but during the Pauranic period *Upendra* came to be recognised as another name of Vishnu and far surpassed Indra in glory. Among our Vedic sages was a blind man named *Dirghatamas* who has the distinction of conceiving the idea of God for the first time and describing it clearly in the Vedic hymns composed by himself. The idea of one God is found at many places in the Vedas.

During the *Brahmana* period, (2500—1400 B. C.) emphasis was chiefly laid on the sacrifices and rites and ceremonies connected therewith. The Vedas were during this period divided into various parts and fully commented upon. The *Upnishads* represent the philosophical side of the Brahmins. They improved upon the idea of God and founded ethics. We shall describe the idea of God later on, but at present it is sufficient to give its broad out-lines as then propounded. We have the delineation of this idea in the *Kena Upanishad* by means of an illustration. It is said there that the divinities saw Him at some distance in a very grand form and sent Marut (the air-god) to Him as messenger. Marut told Him that he could blow away the entire universe whereupon He

asked him to blow away a straw, which Marut could not do with all his power. Marut then went back crestfallen to the assemblage of the divinities, when Agni, the fire-divinity, was similarly sent and defeated by his inability to burn that straw after having boasted as to his ability to burn down the entire universe. Indra, the King of the divinities, then went there himself but God did not even appear before him. The goddess Uma then explained to him the all-powerful nature of God. This illustration does not mean that God has any body; it is only meant to show that nothing can happen without His will. It is said in the Upanishats that man cannot realize the nature of God on account of his limited powers. This is why our sages have described Him by the words "Neti, Neti," i.e. He is free from the trammels of cause and effect and is unknowable. The world however could not rest satisfied with this simple but unintelligible description and so the sages have given some ideas about Him by way of illustration. The first description of Him is given by the word *Sachchidananda*, which means that He is all truth, all knowledge and all bliss. He has established the universe, is all-powerful, omniscient, omnipresent, and without a beginning or end. He is called Parmatma, Parabrahma, Parmeshwara etc. He has no properties, no action and no wish. There may appear some contradiction in this description, but we shall give further on the reasons which go to reconcile the apparent contradictions.

The above is our highest idea of God and it is claimed that no other religion has conceived a grander view of Him or even equalled this conception. Man is however by nature weak and is therefore not always satisfied with such an impersonal God as is described above, in spite of all its logical correctness. Our sage Surdas has clearly said that the cravings of his heart for a personal God could not be satisfied by the cold logic which goes by the name of Nirgun worship, Nirgun meaning propertyless. It were cravings like these which in time

gave rise to the Sagun (possessing properties) worship styled *Sagunopasna*, and we thought of a creator of the universe instead of only its sustainer. The first idealization of God begins at this stage as He became Ishwara and did not remain only Parameshwara. The Upanishats regard the universe beginningless and God propertyless and actionless, while the universe of Sagunopasana is with a beginning and its God engages in action. This action is called Maya (illusion), and so Ishwar has Maya while Parmeshwar has none. The Mohamedan and the Christian ideas of God are allied to our Ishwara. They consider our Nirgunopasana not only difficult of conception, but actually wrong. With the establishment of the Sagunopasana, we established caste system among us. We had no such thing during the Vedic period. Originally we had only the difference of colour between the Aryans and the non-Aryans, as appears from the word Varna (colour). Subsequently we developed the sub-divisions of Brahman, Kshattri and Vaishya out of the Aryans. In the Veds the Brahman is only the title given to a certain priest in the sacrifices. Our Sagunopasana strengthened the principle of sacrificing animals at the Yajnas and established caste-system.

The *Sutra period* (1400—500 B. C) excels in the art of compressing into the smallest possible number of words ideas which previously could only be expressed at great length. The brevity of these Sutras beats even the terse language used in the most laconic telegrams. It was said that the sages were more pleased at their ability to reduce the language of an aphorism by a single syllable than they would have been if a child were born to them. This passion for compression was due to the fact that the entire Vedic literature so far, bulky as it was, existed only in memory and not in writing. Even though evidence exists to show that the art of writing existed in the Sanhita period, it is certain that no advantage was taken of it in the writing of our ancient sacred literature.

The otherwise mad passion for compression prevailing during the Sutra period was therefore the natural outcome of circumstances.

The Sutras (aphorisms) have been divided into 3 parts *viz.* Dharma (duty) Sutras, Grihya (Household) Sutras and Shruta (Vedic) Sutras. The present authors have thought fit to put in a fourth division which may be called the Sphuta (miscellaneous) Sutras. The Sutras as a whole give wonderfully minute and extensive details about sacrificial and household rites, and contain learned dissertations on such subjects as sciences, philosophy, sociology, mathematics, politics, religion and various others, with the result that valuable details of the life and the society of that period can be gathered from these works. They constitute thus an invaluable part of the Indian literature and along with the Upanishats are the pride of the Hindu world. They developed the old Vedic literature of India and also conceived the idea of Trimurti referred to above, in consequence of the extensive conversions of non-Hindus en bloc into Hinduism, leading to the development of the qualities of accommodation and assimilation.

Meanwhile a silent revolution had been preparing in the arts of language and writing. The language of the Vedic hymns had been in the oldest form now known as the Vedic language, and that used in the Brahmanas was what we call the ancient Sanskrit. The Grammarians had, during the Sutra period, been gradually further regulating it, with the result that about the 7th century B. C., they succeeded in eventually giving to the world a new language which now goes under the name of Sanskrit. On the other hand the art of writing was being brought into general use by another set of workers during the two centuries succeeding the 11th B. C. With the development of language and the art of writing the talents of people found expression in wider channels in the forms of dramas, poems, complicated rules of conduct for the

society on various subjects with a special emphasis on sacrifices, the Puranas and Smrities about the close of the Sutra period. There was some initiation and development of materialistic thought as well. The *Smrities* are the later developments of Sutras dealing mostly with law, while the Puranas concern themselves mainly with History. Strictly speaking this linguistic account is a digression, but the Puranas and Smrities being regarded also as religious works of high authority, it has been thought advisable to touch upon this subject as well.

The Budhistic period (500 B. C.—800 A. D.) ushered in a religious revolution. The idea of Ishwar was the greatest supporter of the caste system and of the sacrifices of animals. This latter defect increased so much that in time our society became guilty of positive cruelty. Our caste-system also introduced various defects in society on account of the natural selfishness of the so-called higher castes. To counter-act these^{*}tendencies, India gave birth at this time to the great Gautama Buddha who tried to improve society by denouncing the two vicious principles. Seeing that the sacrifices were based on the Veds and caste-system on God, Buddha denounced the former and did not admit the existence of the latter. The older Hindu sage Kapila, the father of the world philosophy, had not accepted the existence of God and our Upnishats had already preached the idea of Nirvana (a sort of Mukti or deliverance of the soul). Buddha in his turn accepted these views and preached Nirvana by the exercise of self-restraint or conquest of desires. Of his preachings Mercy is the central idea. Buddhism thus weakened our caste-system, based as it was on the conception of the body of God, and practically ended animal sacrifices. The period in which Buddhism took its root in India was also the period in which Jainism was propounded but as the objects of Jainism were almost similar to those of Buddhism, a mere mention of it is perhaps sufficient for our purposes. In course of

time Buddhism came to be divided into what are called the Hinayana and the Mahayana sects.

The Pauranic period (500 B. C.—1000 A. D.). The Puranas are our sacred books of a mainly historical nature. Buddhism had done considerable good to India but during its advanced stages, the Buddhists drifted into rank atheism and established a complicated system of idol worship. The people of a weak character lost all fear of vice by the absence of the fear of God, which led to a decline of morality. The Hindus on the other hand saw that their Vedic personification of the forces of nature and the Nirgun God could not satisfy the people, even when coupled with the elements of the idea of Trinity and a certain admixture of *Sagun* worship (*i.e.*, a personal God). The properties of their Ishwar therefore went on developing with time until the idea of Ishwar grew into that of Vishnu who became the chief Aryan deity. The main work of Vishnu, however, remained the sustenance of the universe, which was the main attribute of Parameshwar and not of Ishwar, the latter being also the creator which the former was not. This idea of creation considered logically establishes, as will appear later, some defect in the idea of God. The Aryan Hindus therefore thought of Brahma as the creator instead of giving a smallness to Vishnu by attributing this idea to him, and as the idea of Ishwar (the creator) had arisen out of that of Parameshwar (the sustainer), they mentioned in their sacred writings that Brahma was born on a lotus arising out of the navel of Vishnu.

By this time the relations between the Aryans and the non-Aryans had become very cordial and the divinities of the two communities had long been intermingling with each other, on account of our habit of assimilation. Their divinities were chiefly ghosts and the Vedic divinity, Rudra, of the Aryans much resembled ghosts. The prayers to him in the Veds are mostly intended to avoid his anger rather than to gain any positive favour from him.

He is mentioned there as the father of the air-god who, as previously noted, was originally a human being. Thus Rudra had personal relations with man and so in time became popular with the non-Aryans. Their ghosts became the followers of Rudra. Hirannyakashyapu, Ravan, Vana and other prominent and even ordinary non-Aryans were all worshippers of Rudra. As Rudra was a mischievous divinity according to the Veds, he got in time the work of destruction, as we had already developed the ideas of the Preserver and the Creator and naturally also required a Destroyer. Thus was completed the famous idea of the Triunity, or the three divinities, namely the creator, the preserver and the destroyer.

Vishnu remained the favourite divinity of the Aryans and Rudra captured the imagination of the non-Aryans. Neither party cared much for Brahma and so it is said in the holy books that a curse was pronounced upon him to the effect that he would no longer be worshipped. When Rudra entered the Trinity, his position improved by degrees, till he became not only the destroyer but also the giver of great boons and came to be called Shiva (the giver of comforts), Asutosha (one who gets pleased very early) and Mahadeo (the great divinity). In spite of this, he is still conceived as having a family consisting of a wife and two sons, while Vishnu and Brahma are supposed to have no such families attached to them besides a wife each who are also original Goddesses. The consort of Mahadeo on the other hand was regarded as being originally human and rising only later to the position of a Goddess.

Some other points also go to show the original ordinary position of Shiva. We have three gunas (properties), called Sat (truth), Raj (desire) and Tam (darkness). Of these three Vishnu has Sat and Brahma Raj but to Shiva is attributed only Tam, the lowest of them all. Further, the ancient sacred books of the Hindus enjoin that a temple dedicated to Shiva should

be located outside a village, while the shivite worship is predicted to increase only in the Kali Yuga, the worst period of all the Hindu ages. Besides, the chief worshippers of Shiva are Gosains whose position in society is rather low. Shiva is also called Asutosh, a divinity who can be quickly moved into granting great boons with little effort, an idea giving rise to a suspicion of injustice. All these points seem to show that the eventual higher worship and the greater position of Shiva are due to the admixture of the Aryan and non-Aryan civilizations. The Aryan civilization had its greatest effect in Northern India, while in the Southern India we have still the preponderance of non-Aryans, insomuch so that many of their Brahmans also are thought by some scholars to have been originally non-Aryans. It is thus that the worship of Vishnu prevails mostly in the Northern as that of Shiva in the southern parts of India. To establish unity in the Trinity, our sages called the three divinities, *viz.*, Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, the three aspects of one God. Vishnu, however, is His chief representative and Brahma therefore is supposed to have been born out of him and Shiva out of Brahma. These three divinities are thus considered the representatives of God, Indra, Marut, Yama, etc., being merely angels. The former set thus assumed greater and greater importance during the Pauranic period while the position of the latter became worse and worse till it grew very poor as compared with that in the Veds. The conception of Trimurti, it may be added, was initiated in the Sutra period and reached its perfection during the Pauranic ; hence its delineation here.

We have dealt with the Pauranic period after the Buddhistic period, although this is not quite consistent with the current ideas of the Hindus. Owing to the high respect offered by the Hindus to antiquity, the Indian sages have always tried to prove every thing religious to be as old as possible. Thus all the 18 Puranas have been ascribed to but one writer, Vyasa, although they are so

voluminous and contradictory to one another as to render it practically impossible for them to have been the productions of a single individual. It was for this very reason that attempts have been made to put the Pauranic period prior to the Buddhistic. There is, however, important internal evidence which proves the priority of the Buddhistic over the Pauranic ideas. Gautama Buddha was born about 567 years before Christ. He revised the religion and criticised the then current customs and religious ideas of Hindus. He denounced the sacrifices and the Veds and did not accept God, but said nothing for or against the Pauranic ideas. If they had been prevalent, their importance would have doubtless led him to take cognizance of them. Further, it is admitted that the Ramayan by Valmiki is a work older than the Puranas. This work does not mention even the Pauranic ideas, showing thereby that not only the Purans but even the Pauranic ideas did not exist during his time. He had, it has been proved, preceded Buddha only by about a century. Our great sage Shankaracharya, on the other hand, succeeded in the 8th century in ousting Buddhism with the help of the Pauranic religion. It appears therefore that the Pauranic religion spread in India after Valmiki and Buddha and before Shankara, a view supported by numerous other well established historical authorities also.

Rama, Krishna and other personages mentioned in the Puranas, no doubt lived before Buddha, but it seems they were not regarded as incarnations of Vishnu while they lived. When the great importance of individuality increased in India along with the striking success of the life of Buddha, the Hindus evolved the conception of incarnation and gave Buddha the honour of being an incarnation of Vishnu. They then deified eight others of remoter ages and vusted them with similar honour, regarding Buddha as the ninth incarnation. Thus we strengthened the idea of Trinity and originated that of Incarnations during the Pauranic period. We have said above that the conception of Ishwar was the first Hindu idealization of

God ; Trinity is the second and incarnations the third idealization of Him. The Hindu idea of incarnation resembles that of the Prophets of other religions, though there are several important differences between them.

When Shankaracharya overcame Buddhism he found idol worship greatly prevalent among its followers and probably among the Hindus also to a large extent. This is the fourth idealization of God, which gave scholars help in meditation and ordinary people an object of worship. Shankaracharya not only did not denounce idol worship but lent to it the great weight of his powerful support, with the result that it increased enormously. We really got idol-worship from the Buddhists.

The Mohammedan and the Christian ideas of God are allied to our first and the second idealizations of Parameshwara while their ideas of Prophets resemble our third idealization. They consider our fourth idealization (*i.e.* idol-worship) too low, but the highest Hindu conception of God (Parameshwar) may justly be claimed to be too high for the conceptions of God as given in other religious systems, as will be attempted to be proved later. It must however be kept in view that there are always persons of all grades of development in the world and every body requires religious training. We should therefore encourage religiosity in men of a low mental development also instead of laughing at them. The Hindu religion provides therefore suitable ideas for persons of the lowest as well as the highest mental development, while the Western religions do not do so, with the result that their followers of the highest and the lowest mental developments are often found indifferent to religion, the lowest resorting to some sort of idolatry and the highest being often left quite blank. There are millions of people in the world for whom only an idol can form the basis of a personal religion. This is why idol-worship also is considered necessary by the Hindus. It originated with the Buddhists but spread among Hindus also and acquired great popularity during the reign of the Kushans.

THE GITA

The best exposition of the latter-day Hinduism is found in the Bhagwadgita which is a part of the Mahabharata, a very comprehensive historical and semi-religious book of the Hindus. The *Bhagwadgita* (also called *Gita*) is a sort of a compromise between the philosophies of the Upanishats and the Puranas. It may be said to lay down the following three different stages in the development of a religious Hindu :—

(a) The first stage is meant for an ordinarily good house-holder. He must do good to himself, no direct injury to others and good to them so far as possible. The words "direct injury" have been used in contradistinction to indirect injury which may be said to be done, for instance, by capitalists in benefitting themselves at the expense of others, such injury to others being not prohibited apparently with the object of encouraging competition.

(b) The second stage is intended for a Karma Yogi for whom Sanyas and Yoga are necessary. A Sanuyasi is one who desires nothing for himself and does no harm to others ; Yoga on the other hand enjoins action. By combining these two we see that the Karma Yogi should not desire anything for himself, should not injure others even indirectly and should do something. We thus come to penances, gifts and Yajnas as the proper actions for a Yogi. Penances help self-conquest ; gifts are not only financial, but are also of physical, moral and intellectual nature, including gifts of material and moral help, time, happiness, etc. The Gita, while speaking of the objects of gift, says that an educated and mild Brahman, the sacred cow, an elephant, the unholy dog and the non-touchable out-caste are all to be considered as equally good, provided they really deserve the gift. The Western philosophical principles of benevolence, utilitarianism, etc. are included in this principle of gift.

Hobbs in the west propounded that self-love is the only motive of action and Butler added benevolence to it as a further motive power. The question then arose as to what sort of benevolence was required and Mill answered it by his theory of Utilitarianism as the standard of conduct. The further question then arose as to the object to which utilitarianism was to be directed and Bentham established the standard of "the greatest good of the greatest number." The question further arose as to what sort of good was meant, to which Spencer replied by his theory of Evolutionary utilitarianism. It has since been established in the West that mere utilitarianism cannot be considered the goal of ethics. All these points are included in the principle of gift as propounded in the Gita and, because this cannot represent the highest goal, Gita has placed it in the second and not the highest stage. The third proper action for a Yogi is Yajna (sacrifice) which is of three kinds, namely that relating to matter, prayers and self-study. Material Yajna means sacrifice to fire *i. e.* Havana, and is supposed to lead to public good by purifying the air. Prayers help meditation and self-study leads to deliverance by promotion of knowledge.

Thus the Gita lays down benevolence, conquest of desires, promotion of knowledge and meditation for a house-holder who renounces his home and enters a religious order, that is, reaches the second stage of religious development. The first of these actions maintains his habit of work but directs his energy towards good to others by prohibiting selfish work. The second and the third lead to self-elevation, while the fourth leads him on to yet higher religious realms culminating in the deliverance of soul. This is called Karma Yog. Karma, Akarma and Vikarma are to be distinguished according to the Gita. Karma literally means action, but philosophically it connotes an action for satisfaction of selfish desires while Akarma is action in satisfaction of unselfish desires and includes natural actions unconnected with desire, such as digestion, circulation of blood, etc.

Vikarma means good action. A **Yogi** according to the **Gita** should do only **Akarm** and **Vikarm**.

(c) The third stage is known as that of **Dhyana Yogi**, **Dhyana** meaning meditation. Such a **Yogi** does only **Akarm** and is enjoined to do no action beyond the natural actions for the preservation of his body. He should constantly meditate on God. If he succeeds in achieving this, there remains no action for him and he attains deliverance. If one attains this stage even at the time of death, his soul is delivered. Generally one is supposed to arrive at this high stage by collective good efforts of the present and previous lives.

Devotion is a very important element in maintaining a **Yogi** at this high stage. It is practised from five different stand-points, namely *Shant*, *Das*, *Vatsalya*, *Sakkhya* and *Shringar*. The **Shant** (peaceful) devotion is natural and without motive, as was the case with that of **Prahlad**. This is generally found in the love of children towards parents or other similar relatives. It is taught in christianity and is also the basic principle of the **Ramanuj** sect of **Vaishnavas** (worshippers of **Vishnu**). The **Das** form of devotion is that of a servant towards his master ; **Mohammad** and **Tulsidas** are illustrations of this form of devotion. The **Vatsalya** form represents the love of parents or elders towards children or similar persons ; **Dasrath**, **Yasoda** and **Vallabhacharya** illustrate this form of devotion. The **Sakkhya** form is that of friendship ; **Surdas** is its illustration. The **Shringar** form of devotion is the love of a woman for a man. The devotees of this idea hold that the masculine nature is only in God, while the devotees are in the position of women on account of their dependence on Him. Such devotion is also styled as being of the **Sakhi** nature, **Sakhi** meaning a female companion. A vast majority of the Hindu devotees adhere to this form of devotion ; **Chaitanya**, **Hari Das** and **Hit Harivansh** are its illustrations. This is the form of devotion which led to the composition of amorous songs by the devotees.

The above are the five stand-points of devotion. The methods of practising devotion are nine-fold, namely listening to sacred discourses, praising the Almighty, meditation, worship of His feet, general worship, prayers, absolute obedience, friendship and self-renunciation. Here end our remarks on the Gita.

The Pauranic ideas synchronised with the Buddhistic period but it was Shankaracharya who fully established them by effecting the over-throw of Buddhism in India, Idol-worship and pilgrimages to sacred places increased among Hindus during this period. The origin and popularization of the Mahayana sect of Buddhists is due greatly to the spread of Pauranic ideas in the country, culminating in the assimilation and incorporation of Buddhism with Hinduism.

The places of pilgrimages are famous either for particular idols or for some river, sea, mountain, incarnation, etc. During the Brahmanic period we had practically no place of pilgrimage sacred to any idol. Many pilgrimages are mentioned in the Puranas, such as those of the Pandavas, Balram and Nanda, but no mention is made of any idol in them. It is now said that Rama himself consecrated the idol of Rameshwar, but this is not mentioned in his extensive biography by Valmiki and must thus be ruled out.

The present day Hindu religion (1000 A. D. and onwards) lays emphasis on idols and pilgrimages. Many reformers, such as Nanak, Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswati, have tried to improve our religious ideas according to the present needs, but the emphasis continues to be as above. Baba Nanak tried to unite the Hindu and Muhammadan religions; the result of his efforts is Sikhism. The Brahmo Samaj is the outcome of the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It tries to simplify our religion by preaching the unity of God and doing away with the various and often contradictory ideas and glosses on sacred books which exist among us. Swami Dayanand

resuscitated the Vedas and denounced caste system, idol-worship, pilgrimages and incarnation, chiefly perhaps on account of the financial and other material losses to the country which they undoubtedly involve. The efforts of these reformers have no doubt met with a certain amount of success and may very probably succeed further in due course, but at present by far the vast majority of our people continue to follow the lead of the Pauranic age.

If we eliminate the pre-Vedic period, as unimportant, from our short historical survey of the Hindu religion, we have had the Vedic, the Buddhistic, the Pauranic and the Present-day periods in it. The emphases during them have been laid respectively on sacrifices plus God, conquest of desires plus Nirvana, Trimurti plus incarnations, and idols plus pilgrimages. The chief objects of worship during these periods have thus been God in the Vedic, Trimurti in Pauranic, and idols in the present period, while among the Budhists no such object of worship was recognized.

At first we emphasized God, then His first idealization (Ishwar) and then in turn His second, third and the fourth idealizations (Trimurti, incarnations and the idols.) One may therefore argue that our idealizations went on becoming coarser and coarser till they degenerated into stone ! It must be admitted that if our religious growth is criticized from the points of view of philosophy and logic alone we shall be able to show mostly deterioration instead of advancement and growth of coarseness in place of refinement as time went on. One can very well argue from this that our alleged gradual progress has in reality been only a fall. This is however not the fact. No religion can be called great by its being recognized by only a few philosophers and logicians. For a religion to be great, it must be professed by millions of people, as it does good to the world in proportion to the number of its actual adherents. Our highest Vedic conception of God could not have been the basis of the personal

convictions of the masses who must possibly have been without any personal religion at the time. The popularity of the Hindu religion went on increasing with the development of the above idealizations, till it has succeeded in satisfying personal religious cravings of all grades of people, with the result that religion has entered into the every day life of the Hindus.

The amount of mildness, tenderness and charity in an average Hindu of an ordinary mental development is perhaps far greater than that possessed by similarly developed people of other religions. They give flour to ants and fish, wheat and Gur (Raw sugar) to wild monkeys and milk even to serpents. The Hindu is predominantly merciful to lower animals, the respect for the cow being a sufficient illustration of this characteristic. Philanthropy is the highest ideal of other people but Hindus have propounded love for even lower animals and universe-worship itself is one of the five duties enjoined in their Shastras. Very few butchers will be found among the Hindus who are seldom seen following any profession involving any form of cruelty. All this is due to the religious advancement of the masses and does credit to the Hindu sages for their idealizations of God. They aimed at increasing the popularity of the Hindu religion and have succeeded in securing their object. As education and general intelligence increases the Hindus will surely go on adopting higher ideals for personal convictions. None of their idealizations or conceptions has been entirely dropped. They are all accepted by different persons in varying grades of development, and it must not be lost sight of that the very noblest and highest ideals and principles of religion, suitable for the most developed soul, do exist in Hinduism in abundance and the masses have gradually to be led to that high standard.

PART II

We have given above the evolution of our religion and its peculiarities at different stages of our society ; we have also stated the chief points of importance in Hinduism. It now remains for us to consider its subsidiary principles and convictions. It is not necessary for all to accept them, but a majority of Hindus do as a matter of fact believe in them.

KARMA AND TRANSMIGRATION OF SOUL.

The theories of Karma (action) and transmigration of soul are our most important points after God. What they mean is that soul never dies, but either attains deliverance or gets another body on severing its connection with its present habitation, the importance and defects of this new body being determined by the good and bad actions of our past lives. This is the theory of Karma (action) and transmigration of soul, called Karmic Siddhant and Avagaman in Sanskrit. Many arguments are advanced in support of the transmigration theory, but we content ourselves with only two of them here, as they appear to be the strongest and most convincing.

(1) Natural Science tells us that assimilation, self-preservation and reproduction are the three qualities which distinguish an animate from an inanimate object. The simplest form of life is a cell, while the most developed is the human body, so far as our experiences carry us. If an injury is caused to a living body, not excepting even a tree, it would try to heal up in time, which will not be the case with a stone or a clod of earth ; this is self-preservation. The living bodies also take in air and food but make out of them flesh, blood etc. ; this is assimilation. A cell would take in congenial matter and grow in time ; it would then divide itself into two cells. Similar is the case with other animate bodies ; this is reproduction of the species. Science has been able to discover all this, but it is quite unable to produce a single

cell without the help of a previously existing cell. It has found out the elements which go to make that cell but it cannot produce even a single cell out of those elements, to say nothing of any living being in a higher stage of development. All this shows that there is something over and above matter that goes to make a living body. Millions of such cells go to form a complicated body like a human being. When a man dies, his body is not altogether dead, as the different cells which form it keep still alive. It is the circulation of blood which gives them sustenance and when this ceases for full three hours, we have the death of even the strongest of all the cells which go to form the body. These cells cannot produce the power of volition in the same way as the elements composing the cell cannot produce the cell itself. It is the brain which is the centre of volition, and this goes to prove the existence of soul. As the elements composing the cell cannot produce it without the addition of some sort of life, so the cells which make the brain cannot produce it without the addition of some other sort of life which is called soul. When the soul is extinct and the power of volition is gone, all the cells cannot sustain the life of the body. The question whether or not volitionless living bodies have a soul is not being enquired into at this stage. What we have to see here is that bodies possessing volition have a soul each. When we have seen that this soul is independent of every thing which makes up the body, it follows that the soul may not cease to exist after it has left the body. Something cannot be produced out of nothing. The cells which go to form the body cannot complete it without the addition of soul which is not a part of them. It follows that it must have existed before the particular grouping together of the cells attracted it to that body.

(2) The second argument in this connection rests on a presumption of the existence of God. He is great and omniscient. Such a God being unaffected by anything is

bound to be just and must do the right thing. But we see that in all instances there is no justice in this world if previous deserts of the present lives be not taken into account. Individuals are by birth strong or weak, rich or poor, wise or foolish, kings or slaves, healthy or sickly, and so forth. Why do we see so much difference in the kingdom of a just God if there is no pre-birth and post-mortem existence to account for it? Again all people do not always get suitable punishments or rewards for their bad or good actions in this world. We see many vicious people flourishing till death and a host of virtuous individuals suffering the worst of miseries for the greater part of or throughout their lives! God would thus be very unjust if there were no post-mortem reward or punishment for such persons. It would not do to contend that the mental sufferings of the vicious and similar satisfaction of the virtuous in themselves constitute sufficient punishment or reward; such an argument cannot carry conviction. A baby is not responsible for its deeds, and those dying immediately after their birth have no deeds! What shall be their fate after death consistently with justice, if there is no pre-birth or post-mortem existence? If human life be likened to an organism arising only out of natural causes, everything would become accidental and aimless. The seriousness of life and the justice of God would suffer by this assertion. When even ordinary men arrange their things after pre-meditation, it cannot be said with any show of propriety that things are accidental and aimless in the kingdom of God. For these reasons the theories of Karma and metempsychosis appear to be absolutely unassailable. No argument is adduced here in support of the existence of God, as it is not positively denied in any religion. We are for the purposes of this essay dealing only with theists.

The caste system and Ashram Dharma

The caste system was originally non-existent among us. When the Aryans came to India they were white, while

the Dasyus (aborigines) were a black people and much behind their conquerors in civilization. This is why a difference of colour called *Varna Bhed* (colour distinction) was established here through the natural desire of the Aryans neither to treat the Dasyus as their equals nor to mix freely with them. The Aryans in time divided themselves into three classes, viz., the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), and Vaishyas (traders), according to the professions which they followed. These divisions gradually became ancestral and stereotyped in time, on account of the pride and selfishness of those who happened to enjoy a higher status in society. The Brahmins were assigned six special duties, namely to perform sacrifices and to help others in performing them, to study and to teach, to give things in charity and to accept gifts. The Kshatriyas had only three duties viz., performing sacrifices, studying and giving things in charity, besides their primary business of fighting and administering the country. The Vaishyas busied themselves with trade and commerce, besides performing the three other duties of the Kshatriyas. The Dasyus came to be called Sudras and were gradually reduced to the hereditary position of labourers and coolies.

We also had originally the Ashram Dharma, with the above caste system called the Varna Dharma. The two were inseparable from each other and were called together the Varnashram Dharma. Ashram Dharama required a man to be a student for the first 25 years of his life and then to become respectively a house-holder, a Vanaprastha and a Sannyasi for the succeeding periods of 25 years each, the full span of life being regarded to extend over 100 years. Vanaprastha and Sannyasi are allied to the positions of Karma Yogies and Dhyana Yogies of the Gita.

It is clear that a rigid caste system produces inactivity and degeneration by giving undeserved prominence to the favoured classes and leads by the accident of birth to disunion by elevating less competent men of

the favoured classes over the heads of better individuals of the so-called lower ones. At the same time it may reasonably be claimed to constitute a sort of a division of labour which is very advantageous under the principles propounded in Economics. This is why the original Aryans respected caste system for only a house-holder, based, it must be added, on Karmas (deeds) and not on birth. In time it became ancestral and the four stages fixed by the Ashram Dharma dropped down, leaving only the stage of a house-holder practically for all periods not excepting even the student life. The system has therefore assumed its worst stage now and is pernicious in every way. There was a time when there was no caste system among the Hindus, and the time seems to be fast approaching when it shall again be no more. All their religious reformers have denounced it. Kapil, Gautama Buddha, Mahavir Tirthankar, Nanak, Kabir, Vallabhacharya, Chaitannya, Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand, Ranade and others are all among its denouncers and it must go in due course.

Other Minor Points

(1) Both interdining and inter-marriage among members of different castes are prohibited at present. The former came to be prohibited only a few centuries ago, while the latter has been denounced for the Kali Yuga only, which is said to be the worst period of the Hindus. These prohibitions are not parts of the Hindu religion and are expected to be removed in time. They have their root rather in history than in religion.

(2) Cow-worship is due to gratefulness, in view of the fact that India has always been primarily an agricultural country for which cows are a great necessity.

(3) The worship of rivers, tanks and trees seems to be a relic of the old animism. The sacred sages of the Hindus lived mostly on the banks of great rivers and on mountains owing to the heat of the country. Some of

them are therefore sanctified by their sacred memories and some others by great historical events.

(4) The importance of what are known as the incarnations is due to our third idealization of God and to hero-worship and respect for antiquity.

(5) Respect for women has always been a part of Hindu life. They have given feminine personifications to almost all ideas of goodness and beauty. Idealization and personification have been current among them in great abundance. Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth), Saraswati (the goddess of learning) and Durga (the goddess of power) are all illustrations of their habit of personification. This respect for women received some set-back during the Buddhistic period and is receiving some check from the Pardah and Joint Family Systems. Ignorance, illiteracy and degradation of the masses have lowered it greatly, but it is certainly not so bad even now as many imagine. The Hindu woman receives a good deal of respect even to-day, specially in educated families, and will receive more and more of it with the increase of education.

(6) There are 16 Samskars (religious ceremonies) during the life of a man from conception down to death. They have mostly dropped out by degrees except tonsure, Upanayan (sacred-thread wearing), marriage, daily baths, daily worship and post-mortem ceremonies. The sacred thread was originally worn only on the occasions of sacrifices and not permanently as is the case now.

The Samskars are, religiously speaking, rather useless.

(7) The considerations relating to Birth-almanacs and propitious stars on occasions of marriages are due to our respect for astronomy which subsequently culminated in the harmful and superstitious astrology. They have no connection with religion.

(8) As Hinduism depends upon character, certain instructions for guidance have been given about it. It is said that every one is born with three debts on his shoulders and to discharge them one must perform five daily duties on attaining the age of discretion. These debts are known as God-debt, sage-debt and parent-debt. The first is repaid by worship of God, the second by the study of the sacred books and the third by giving birth to children. This is why marriage is regarded as a religious duty and sacrament rather than a civil contract. The five daily duties are called Panch Maha Yajnas (the five great sacrifices). They are Brahma Yajna (self study), Deva Yajna (sacrifice to fire), Bhuta Yajna (satisfaction of the entire animate world), Manushya Yajna (respect for the guests) and Pitri Yajna (ancestor worship).

PART III

We have given in the two foregoing parts the definition, the history and the chief and subsidiary principles of Hinduism. Every religion generally expresses opinions on God, soul and matter, although it is not absolutely necessary for it to do so. A proper answer to these questions, however, gives greatness to a religion. The origin of universe is also usually accounted for along with the above.

THE GENESIS AS EXPLAINED BY CERTAIN OTHER RELIGIONS

We shall begin with *genesis* here and start with that given in Judaism, Christianity and Muhammadanism. Their God willed and there was a universe. At first there was no matter and a vast quantity of it was produced by the will of God. The Muhammadan God is in the heavens and also every-where. The Christian God is not omnipresent but can be such when He so desires. Their God has a form. Any being with a form must however be subject to Laws of nature, for there can be no form without matter. As a rule the elements and compounds constituting matter are constantly uniting each with the others and ever changing their combinations. Thus the matter making up God must also be changing. For a form its beginning and end are essential. These points appear to be inconsistent with the greatness of God. They are mentioned here not to denounce any religion but to show that any conception of God which is lower than that of Parameshwar and is merely allied to the Hindu idea of Ishwar cannot be logically supported, consistently with the other accepted ideas about Him.

The Soul according to some religious beliefs gets a body only once and then waits in the grave till the day of Judgment, when God distributes its deserts according to

its actions. Before that day the winds of Heaven or Hell blow into their graves according to their actions. It follows that the sinner who dies nearer the day of judgment will be less troubled by the winds of hell than the older "under-trials." Further, God is to listen to the recommendations of the Prophets, even if there are no actions to the credit of the believer. It is further left unsaid as to why God has no time for distributing justice before the day of judgment. All these are rather thorny points.

The above description of the genesis is moreover against the Law of nature which says that something cannot come out of nothing. Could not God bring about a genesis consistently with the Laws of nature which He has himself established so immutably? There could be no need for Him to violate His own laws.

Another important question which arises in this connection is why God thought it fit to create the world at a particular time and not before or after that? Wish is the outcome of want. One who already possesses every thing will never desire for anything. To say that God had the power to create the universe but had not with Him the universe itself is not enough as He did feel some sort of want without the universe or else He would not have created it. The existence of want in God is a sign of weakness, which is inconsistent with His other attributes. The Christian God feels sorry for others which is not in keeping with His greatness. The idea of individual mercy is against law and order. The Laws of nature are themselves merciful, in that you sow one seed and reap quite a number of them in return. Individual mercy is however always against justice. It would thus be clear that whenever any attribute of Iswara or trinity is applied to God, it must necessarily lead to inconsistencies.

The Hindu theory of the genesis

The greatest objection against the Hindu idea of God is that the creation of the universe would establish actions

and also a want in Him as shown above, and if He is not the creator of the universe then one of the greatest arguments in support of Him is gone. The reply is that He may in a way be said to have created the universe and is still actionless. There are certain forces of nature such as gravitation, co-hesion, capillarity etc., which have by degrees created this universe out of atoms. The scientists of the day lean towards evolution and think that this universe has come to its present shape by gradual improvements during millions and billions of years and nothing has happened suddenly as it were by a cataclysm of nature. All these forces of nature are only manifestations of God. They have shaped the world out of atoms and so it can be said that God has created the world. But in reality He is only the sustainer of the universe as He sustains the Laws of Nature.

The Laws which have so far been discovered by the Scientists are not the only Laws, as we have yet been able to know next to nothing of the forces which control souls and other finer things unperceived by our senses or by the instruments made by our scientists. Geologists have shown that the different things on earth have been shaped by pressures of varying degrees and are still in course of formation. Any wonderful phenomenon is thus no sign of any special intervention of God. All the forces of nature are the work of God and there is no action attributable to Him beyond these. We have however been habituated not to call these processes action at all but forces of nature. If these are also to be regarded as acts, then He cannot be said to be actionless. But He does not do any act called as such by the world. The forces of nature are also not His acts but parts of himself, that is He is all-pervading. He does not do any special act but His very nature is such that these things happen of themselves. In this way He is actionless in spite of His being the Sustainer and in a way the Creator of the Universe. If we accept the creation of the world at any particular time, we should be forced to admit change in Him as if He

created the world at one time and then became idle or was idle before. The sudden creation of the Universe against the Laws of nature is most improbable. According to Hindus the Universe has been and is always changing but there was no time when even its atoms or the forces of nature were non-existent. Thus it cannot be said to have been created, although it is always improving and changing.

To establish the want of properties in God is a little more difficult. For this we shall have to consider the nature of property (Guna) and of its subject (Adhar), which is nothing but matter. God has no matter, whereas property cannot exist without matter. The Jains, like Berkeley, think that matter is nothing more or less than a collection of properties, but still the more rational view seems to be to regard matter as the subject of property. Berkeley's theory is not recognized any more. God is not subject to nature but is the sustainer thereof. No property can therefore affect him. Properties are always changing according to the varying conditions of matter, but God never changes. Every being is self-conscious, which means that he considers himself existing and separate from the rest of the world, but God is inseparable from every thing and is therefore not self-conscious. Christian Missionaries argue that there is no animate existence without self-consciousness but existence depends upon existence and not upon the knowledge thereof. God is neither unconscious like inanimate things nor conscious like human beings but has a sort of superior consciousness. Thus He is actionless and propertyless.

What is *soul* and its essence is a question on which there is a great difference of opinion among the Hindu sages. We have already given some reasons in support of its existence under the Karmic Theory and now proceed to delineate its nature as propounded by most of our great sages. The normal condition of body is fourfold and so

sages have described the conditions of soul and God also as below :—

Body—waking, dreaming, sleeping, Turiya.

Soul—Vishwa, Tejas, Prajna, Turiya.

God—Virata, Hiranyagarbha, Ishwara, Brahma.

Turiya is the condition of a greater rest than even sound sleep. The above conditions of God do not really pertain to but are only conceptions of Him, each being an improvement on the other. Soul is called Vishwa while it has a worldly body, Tejas while it has only a fine body (which it has before birth and after death), Prajna while it has a Karan Sharir (a still finer body composed of *Buddhi* or wisdom) and Turiya on its deliverance (Mukti). Virat is the collective word for all the Vishwas (or universes), Hirannyagarbha for all the Tejasas, Ishwar for all the Prajnas and Brahma for all the Turiyas. There is no God separate from the universe, a conception which leads the Westerners to think that Hinduism believes in Pantheism and not pure Theism. It believes, however, that soul and matter are included in God. This is the theory of the Advait philosophy which will be described later on.

Soul is immortal and has three bodies called the Sthul (coarse body or the worldly), the Ling Sharir (fine body) and the Karan Sharir (finer body, also known as *Buddhi Sharir*). Theosophists describe seven bodies of the soul. The Ling Sharir has been described by the Hindus as below :—

“सूक्ष्ममनो बुद्धि दशेन्द्रियैर्युतम्प्राणैरपञ्चीकृतं भूतं सम्भवम् ।

भोक्तुस्तुखादेरपि साधनमभवेच्छरीरं मन्यद्विदुरात्मनो बुद्धाः ॥ ”

(The fine body has mind, wisdom, the five organs of knowledge and five of action, and life. It is the second body of a being and is the vehicle through which he feels pleasure and pain. All that it possesses is in a fine and not in the material form). While awake, a being has

knowledge of his coarse body ; while asleep, of the fine body ; while in the Turiya condition, of the Karan Sharir. The separation of the fine from the coarse body is called death in this world. There is however existence after death when the Ling Sharir feels pleasure or pain according to his actions during worldly life. These are called heaven or hell. They are described very minutely in the Garura Puran. Soul has to get rid of even Karan Sharir before attaining deliverance (or mukti).

The actions of this life produce their effect on the fine body, as a result of which that body transmigrates in time into a better or a worse physical body. When the actions reach the perfection of purity, there remains no further work for a being and he gets rid of even the Karan Sharir and forthwith attains deliverance. Before deliverance, when a fine body is about to get a new coarse body it gets mixed up with the clouds and then reaches its would-be parents to be born in the world. The circumstances of one's life depend partly on the actions of his past life and partly on those of the present life. The natural advantages and disadvantages which a child inherits with its birth in a particular family and country without any apparent exertion on its part are due to its action in a previous life. The utilization by him of his present opportunities is, however, dependent on his present actions. Thus losses and gains which are beyond the control of a person by the exercise of ordinary prudence are attributed to fate (*i.e.*, past actions) and those which can be so controlled are ascribed to a combination of present and past actions.

Many people get so puzzled at times with the results of their own actions or fate that they commit suicide to escape from intolerable miseries. This, according to Hindu beliefs, is entirely wrong. The results of one's bad actions are bound to follow him in every life and cannot be washed off by another sin of suicide. This body is not our property but a trust. It has to be used to the

best of one's ability in doing the best possible actions. As a prisoner cannot avoid his penalty by running away from jail and only adds a further offence against himself by this action, so a person cannot escape his miseries by suicide. They must follow him into the next world with the additional sin of homicide. They can be washed off only by good actions and true repentance and not by an additional sin. One may for a time succeed to evade his worldly jailor, but God's decree based on one's past actions cannot be anyhow evaded. This is why Hindu religion preaches mercy to every being. We may not ridicule any one, as all are in the same cycle of existence. There was a time when we ourselves were worse than the being whom we may be despising to-day and it is possible that in future we may be like or even worse than him. By our very action of laughing at him we are earning sins that drag us down to the level of the same being. It must be remembered that all living beings have started their careers similarly and have to end them in the same way. The differences between us are only of a few steps while miles have to be travelled. It is, therefore, the duty of every individual not to exult or feel depressed mentally to an unusual, or in fact any, extent for temporary rise or fall. Such is the Hindu conception of the soul.

Four Indian views of the inner nature of the soul.

(I) The Jains say there is no Ishwar or Parmeshwar beyond their 24 Tirthankars (delivered souls). Their motto is "Ahinsa Parmo Dharmah" (the greatest duty is respect for life). They consider soul as chaitanya (intelligent), bright and limited. Its size is neither large nor small but medium. When a being does such good actions as to reach perfection, he attains Mukti (deliverance). In the delivered condition it has Nittyanand (everlasting bliss) and it sits on the Moksha Shila (the stone for the delivered) along with the other delivered souls. This stone is very extensive in size. The Universe

of the Jains is beginningless and everlasting. They have no deluge and regard most questions from two or more stand-points, holding that the same object may be of one nature from one stand point and different from another ; this is known as "Syad Vada." They do not usually make categorical statements on abstruse religious points.

(II) The Buddhists hold that the soul is *Buddhi* (wisdom) and it attains deliverance when all the desires leave the body in which it dwells. The Buddhists do not go beyond *Nirvana*. Some scholars think the Buddhists do not accept the idea of a soul itself.

(III and IV) The *Adwait* and the *Vishishtadwait* systems of philosophy were propounded by Hindu sages. They deal with the inter-relations of God, soul and nature. We have also a third system called the *Dwait*, but it is allied to the above two in most respects. The original principles of these systems are all found in the *Upnishads*, but they were fully developed only in the eighth century and also thereafter. The *Adwait* system has been propounded by *Shankaracharya*, the *Vishishtadwait* by *Ramanuj* and the *Dwait* by *Maddhwa*. *Shankaracharya* commands the greatest authority among the Hindus, but the other two systems are also almost equally respected.

According to the *Adwait* system there is God alone and no soul or matter. It says matter is only an illusion and the soul something like a reflection of God. It is self-conscious owing to want of true knowledge, as consciousness implies separation between the conscious being and the rest of the world, while in reality there is God alone and nothing else in the universe. *Shankara* gives powerful arguments, like *Bishop Berkeley*, to prove that matter is non-existent and our so-called sensual perception of it is only an illusion. As regards soul, he says that it is formed by the attraction of something like a reflection of God by *Buddhi* which is the essence of matter and becomes possessed of the quality of attraction in its purest form. Thus a *Buddhi Sharir* (intellectual body) is formed which

in time acquires a fine body with power of thinking. As thoughts are actions, it acquires a coarse body also according to their breadth or narrowness. That body begins its life in this Universe till it reaches the highest stage of deliverance by the acquisition of complete knowledge. The Brahmos are mostly the followers of this Adwait system and so are a vast majority of the Hindus.

The Vishishtadwait system of Swami Ramanujacharya regards God, soul and matter as all true and real. Soul is according to him like an atom, but is limitless at the same time and its atomic idea is put forth only by way of analogy. In reality soul has no shape. Soul and the universe are both beginningless and endless. Soul is self-conscious, and therefore it begins to think on account of its limited knowledge. It thus gets a Karan Sharir (Intellectual body) and again a fine body which in its turn gets a coarse body according to the nature of its thought-actions. It goes on acquiring true knowledge during its successive births or acquisitions of coarse bodies till it acquires perfect knowledge and attains deliverance. During this delivered condition, it possesses this knowledge and so can no longer think and fall into bondage. The souls being innumerable, there is no fear of their stock running short. There is no theory of illusion in the Vishishtadwait system. Ramanuj lays great stress on devotion and his teachings somewhat resemble those of Jesus Christ, insomuch so that some Theosophists hold that he was the incarnation of Christ in India. He did not give up the idea of God, but laid stress on Ishwar owing to his devotional side. He is the founder of a great Vaishnavite sect, but did not admit the Sudras among his followers. His disciple Ramanand removed this bar and thus founded the important sub-sect called Ramanandi.

The Dwait system accepts the Adwait theory as regards the matter and of the Vishishtadwait theory as to the soul. It thus gives nothing new, but only makes a selection. It was propounded by Maddhwa Swami who was also the

founder of a great Vaishnavite sect. The idea of God in the three system is substantially the same except that the Adwait system much enhances His greatness by doing away with soul and matter. The Vishishtadwait system accepts all the three, while the Dwait system accepts God and soul only. Our personal view is that God and matter must be taken as true but we would accept the Adwait conception of the soul. The reasons in support of this view will be given presently.

Mukti or Deliverance

Transmigration of soul is bondage and freedom from it means the deliverance of the soul. The Adwait system teaches that when the soul's want of knowledge is removed by acquisition of perfect knowledge, the fine and the Karan bodies are destroyed and the reflection which was at once the cause and the bondage of the soul, is set free. It is like the union of a drop with the ocean, although the analogy does not apply literally, as the drop is a reality and soul a mere illusion. The Vishishtadwait idea of deliverance has already been described in the delineation of that system. The Christians hold that a delivered soul is always trying to reach but never actually reaches God, though it has perfect bliss in this attempt. The Muhammadans give no idea of deliverance over and above the attainment of heaven.

The Authors' own views

It is rather presumptuous for ordinary laymen like us to offer a criticism of these profound systems of philosophy, but having gone so far we are tempted to offer our views for what they may be worth. Only they must not be considered as forming part of Hinduism.

The origin of soul as described in the Adwait system seems rather attractive as the reflection theory supplies some sort of a stepping stone between the animate and the inanimate creation, but the sister-theory of the non-existence of matter makes the whole thing rather incomprehensible. When there is in reality no such thing as

matter, its real essence, Buddhi (wisdom), must also be an unreality. How could it then attract the reflection of God in its real form when it had no real form at all? Even admitting that this is a mere illusion for us and nothing for God, the question remains as to whether there was any actual formation of soul or no. If no soul was actually brought into existence, there was no real bondage and no question of deliverance arises. If on the other hand we accept the Vishishtadwait theory of the reality of matter, all these difficulties are solved. The Vishishtadwait theory of soul, however, does not appear quite consistent with reason, although its ideas as to the reality of matter look perfectly correct. When all the souls are limitless and there are innumerable souls, their parts must be overlapping each other. The system moreover lays down that soul thinks. Thought is a mental action which can be performed only by a mind which in its turn cannot exist without a body but this latter the soul does not possess till then. The third difficulty is in connection with the delivered souls which are said to exist as separate entities for no rhyme or reason; their existence after the stage of deliverance can produce no effect upon the universe and would therefore be altogether redundant. God is necessary as He sustains the universe, but the delivered souls do nothing. For redundancies to exist is useless and inconsistent with a wise Providence. These points appear to be sufficient to induce one to accept the Adwait ideas of Soul and the Vishishtadwait ideas of matter. The present-day Dwait system has accepted the ideas of soul from the Vishishtadwait and matter from the Adwait systems, though the reverse would appear to be more reasonable.

Here ends our rather rapid survey of the Hindu religion. It was originally written in Hindi and has now been reproduced in English for the sake of the non-Hindi-knowing readers. The Hindi work contains a few more details relating to the Vaishnavite sects, Sagun worship and deliverance. They have been omitted here as not sufficiently interesting to English readers. It may not perhaps be out of place to

mention that this is a delineation of the Hindu religion by lay writers and therefore may appear superficial at places. It is however offered to the public with the object of stimulating scholarly writers to be induced to interest themselves in the subject.
